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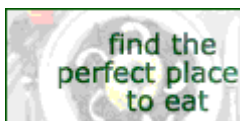
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## Bush cuts unite N.J. lawmakers

### They and others gear up to fight for aid to state

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By LEDYARD KING  
GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

Efforts in New Jersey to beat back the Bush administration's proposed budget cuts are starting to hit full gallop.

More than 2,000 Rutgers University students have signed petitions demanding that Congress fully fund college aid.

Democratic Sens. Jon S. Corzine and Frank R. Lautenberg have written President Bush asking for no cuts to Amtrak.

And Democratic Rep. Rush D. Holt has introduced legislation to restore work-force training cuts.

Even Republicans, though far less critical of the budget proposal than Democrats, are talking about finding more money for a state that gets about 70 cents in aid for every dollar it provides in taxes to the federal till.

"With all due respect, what the president (proposes) isn't what the Congress does," said Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., who's concerned about cuts in Amtrak and homeland security grants. "I don't think any of us from the Northeast ought to accept that we're going to allow less resources to come to the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. I think we're united in that regard."

Bush's proposed \$2.57 trillion budget for fiscal year 2006 would cut after-school programs, substantially reduce grants to hire police officers and eliminate aid for some types of public housing. It also would wipe

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out aid to Amtrak, not fund ongoing beach replenishment projects, cut safe-water programs and provide no specific money for urban Empowerment Zones such as the one in Cumberland County.

Proposed administration cuts are nothing new to the Empowerment Zone, which has had to rely on Congress for aid in recent years. But Bush's proposal to slash federal money for community development block grants and other economic programs as well would make life tougher, said Sandy Forosisky, the zone's executive director.

"They told me to go find other programs when they took away my Empowerment Zone money," she said. "And now, they're taking away those programs."

She plans to talk with Rep. Frank LoBiondo, R-N.J., about saving the grants, though she probably doesn't have to. LoBiondo has been a staunch supporter of Empowerment Zones and plans to fight for funding again.

Dover Township Police Chief Michael Mastronardy said he doesn't think Bush's proposed elimination of the Community Oriented Policing Services, or COPS, program — if upheld by Congress — would immediately affect his Ocean County community. But he said it would have been hard for the township to hire school resource officers or outfit cruisers with computers without COPS seed money over the past decade.

"We'd be in dire straits," he said. "Our public safety has been enriched over the years both in terms of capabilities and staffing levels."

Republicans point out that not all the news for New Jersey is bad under the Bush plan.

Lakehurst Naval Air Station would get a new \$26 million logistics and training center. Sussex County would get \$1.8 million as part of highlands preservation efforts. Polluted Superfund and brownfield sites would get more cleanup money. Garden State schools would get more aid over the next few years to carry out the president's No Child Left Behind program.

Corzine has been especially critical of the Bush budget, and for the senator, the stakes are high: If he wins this year's race for governor, he'd have to find state money to save programs that are cut or decide which ones are no longer affordable.

Will the next governor have to deal with a \$24 million cut in after-school aid, a 30 percent cut in homeland security grants or a cut in beach replenishment money?

"The impacts on New Jersey are extensive," Corzine said. "The president's budget will shove additional unfunded mandates on a state already facing a \$4 billion budget shortfall."

Frelinghuysen, who sits on the Appropriations Committee that shapes federal spending, is likely right in predicting that Congress will make plenty of changes. Last year, only one of the 65 programs that Bush wanted to eliminate was truly erased.

Those that survived included the COPS hiring grants.

"We've heard it year after year, and people get up in arms," Mitchell Sklar, executive director of the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of

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Police, said about proposed cuts to the COPS program. "We've come to think that what is proposed isn't what we'll end up with."

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